

CORRECTIONAL HEALTH

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

U.S. prisons held more than 2 million people on any given day in 2002. Annually, around 600,000 inmates are discharged from prisons, and about 8 to 9 million inmates are released into the community. Correctional facilities house individuals who are disproportionately affected by high rates of infectious diseases and adverse social conditions. Prevalence rates for HIV/AIDS are significantly higher among inmates and releasees than in the total U.S. population. At the end of 2001, the rate of confirmed AIDS in state and federal prisons (0.49%) was more than three times higher than in the total U.S. population (0.14%). Studies have shown that in some facilities, between 14% and 25% of inmates are infected with tuberculosis (TB). Rates of sexually transmitted diseases range from 5% to 35%. About 80% of inmates have a history of substance use or abuse. Most facilities lack comprehensive discharge planning to link releasees with community-based providers for healthcare, substance abuse treatment, and other services.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC promotes a community approach to improve the health of inmates using the collaborative efforts of correctional institutions, public health, and community-based healthcare and social service organizations. CDC and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) have jointly funded seven state/city health departments to design and implement innovative demonstration projects for HIV prevention and care among inmates in prisons and/or juvenile detention centers. CDC has also prepared guidance to help develop and implement TB control programs in correctional settings. In addition, CDC has awarded small grants to more than 20 public health departments to work collaboratively with prisons and juvenile detention facilities in their communities to screen inmates upon intake for syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, TB, and HIV.

Example of Program in Action

The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) provides healthcare services to inmates in the San Francisco County jail system. As part of the CDC/HRSA corrections demonstration project, SFDPH partners with the community-based organization Continuum, to provide discharge planning and transitional case management services for HIV-infected individuals being discharged from the prisons. These services include housing, medical treatment, and basic community survival skills, such as money management education. In addition, SFDPH is piloting a project to provide hepatitis prevention education services and hepatitis B vaccine to high-risk inmates in the prison.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC is developing a website to serve as a resource for those working in correctional health; creating a manual and pocket guide series to help correctional health leaders and practitioners learn more about interventions in prisons; supporting and expanding local coalitions that use discharge planning and case management to link inmates to care and services that focus on areas with high rates of HIV/AIDS or syphilis; and sponsoring forums to facilitate collaboration between public health and correctional agencies.